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Navy & Marine Corps Medical News

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Headline: "Doc" awarded Medal of Honor 32 years after battle
By Earl W. Hicks, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

WASHINGTON--Robert Ingram, an ordinary citizen who showed extraordinary heroism, stood before President Clinton, Friday, July 10 and received the Medal of Honor, an award he earned in 1966 during a battle in Quang Ngai province, South Vietnam.

"On that battlefield so many years ago, Robert Ingram performed truly heroic deeds, and asked for nothing in return," the President said. "At long last, it is time to honor him."

As the President pinned the blue ribbon with its crest of stars around the former Hospital Corpsman Third Class's neck, Ingram's wife Doris, his daughter Dana and son Craig joined friends and former comrades-in-arms witnessing the overdue recognition. The event was the culmination of work by former members of Ingram's Marine unit who knew he had been recommended for the medal years before.

"Mr. Ingram, on behalf of all Americans, we thank you for your service, for your courage, for your determination, for your loyalty to comrades and country," the President said. "We are all proud to call you an American..."

Before and after the presentation, Ingram participated in events befitting a hero: tour of the White House, visit to Arlington Cemetery, socializing at a Chief of Naval Operations reception at the Navy Memorial and attending the Commandant of the Marine Corps' reception before being a

guest at the Marine Barracks 8th and I Evening Parade.

But the cost to then "doc" Ingram for the day of recognition came at a fearful price. His mettle, which had been tested in previous battles, would again be tried as he, along with the rest of Company C of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines maneuvered as part of "Operation Indiana."

The early afternoon of March 28 had been uneventful for the Marines and their corpsmen after being dropped into a landing zone. They moved in the day's heat across hills and tiered rice paddies. Then, the heat of gunfire added to their misery as Company C was ambushed by more than 100 North Vietnamese troops using small arms weapons, mortars and antiaircraft guns.

Immediately after "all hell broke loose," as Ingram described it, many Marines of the lead platoon were hit and needed their corpsman. While trying to sort the wounded from the dead, evacuate others, gather and pass ammunition, Ingram was wounded four times, each wound more severe than the previous. Yet, true to his training and dedication, he continued through the afternoon to tend the wounded Marines.

Later as the sun was setting, Ingram, weak from loss of blood and still under enemy fire, stumbled to an aid station. There, after helping evacuate others he thought needed more immediate attention, he was persuaded to board a helo himself. Then began his more than six months of treatment and recovery.

In Washington, on a sunny Saturday afternoon, decades away from the furor of that day in Vietnam, Ingram and the survivors of his original platoon of Marines visited the Vietnam Memorial the day after his medal presentation. They saw name after name of men in their unit who had died in Vietnam, ordinary citizens who, just as Ingram had, showed their honor, courage and commitment.

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Headline: Denver Sailors and Marines practice healthy lifestyles
From Naval Surface Forces Pacific

SAN DIEGO--The ship's medical team on board USS Denver (LPD 9) lives by the motto "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." According to the ship's medical officer, Feasterville, Pa. native, LT Mike Favata, MC, knowing the crew and planning for their needs is the key to good health and readiness.

"This is the very basis of Navy Medicine, knowing every crew member's health status and anticipating their needs before a major deployment or even before they become part of the ship will ensure ...the overall readiness of the command," he said.

That attitude has contributed to the health of Denver crewmembers and also earned the ship its second "Green H" for health award to be displayed on the ship's bridge wing. The Commander, Naval Surface Forces Pacific initiated the

Surface Force Commander's Annual Wellness Unit Award, better known as the Green "H" award, in 1996. The award encourages ships to develop lifestyle programs that will keep Sailors and Marines healthy and contribute to personnel readiness.

After the award announcements for 1997 were made, it was clear how successful the program is. Seventy of COMNAVSURFPAC's eighty seven ships received the award.

One of Denver's contributions to a healthy crew was furnishing the gym with additional exercise equipment. Hull Maintenance Technician Third Class Michael Hughes, of San Diego, took advantage of having the gear available.

"Since I started a regular exercise program and watched my diet, I have lost 20 pounds and my high blood pressure dropped to normal range," he said.

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Headline: Twins benefit from TRICARE's television house calls

By Rick Haupt, TRICARE, Southern California

SAN DIEGO--Darrin Cooper turns on the television set three mornings a week before going to school. He's not tuning in to watch cartoons or complete a homework assignment. He tunes in to keep his case of chronic asthma under control.

Darrin is not alone in his early morning TV routine. His twin brother, Darrel, suffers from an equally severe case of asthma. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning, the boys call up Nina Walker, NC, Naval Medical Center, San Diego, to report their lungs' performance on a peak flow meter, tell her about any unusual symptoms and get advice on medication.

Walker has worked with the Cooper boys since March, when the Pediatric Asthma Tele-Case Management Project began. The project is sponsored by TRICARE Southern California, the office that oversees implementation of the military health plan and facilitates managed care throughout the region's military hospitals and clinics. Her main duties are to provide the kids' day-to-day care and manage their medication and overall health according to a standardized, physician-directed protocol.

The boys enjoy their early morning consults with Walker and recognize the benefit it brings them. They're also excited about the technology.

"I like it," says Darrel. "It's pretty neat."

Data Processing Technician Second Class Umeki Yvette Cooper, mother of the two 11 year-old boys, has struggled to

manage their disease since they were three. Over the years, the boys have suffered dozens of asthma attacks, many of them requiring nerve-racking trips to hospital emergency rooms and multi-day admissions, some to intensive care units.

Cooper deployed aboard USS Tarawa (LHA 1) in February. Since then, the boys' grandmother, Carolyn Clark, has taken on the responsibility of caring for the boys at home.

"This program is wonderful. Because one of the doctors is on call at all times, it's like having a specialist in your home 24 hours a day," said Clark.

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Headline: New Bremerton business approach improves service
By Judith Robertson, Naval Hospital, Bremerton

BREMERTON, Wash.--Naval Hospital, Bremerton will close its Primary Care Clinic (PCC) Sept. 30 and then offer a "portal" service to better serve its TRICARE Prime customers. The new feature will have expanded choices of access to care and more hours of operation.

"A portal to care is an entry point for accessing primary care services within the Naval Hospital," said Lt. Ron Martel, MSC, head of Managed Care.

Beginning July 21 all new TRICARE enrollees can sign up in either the existing Internal Medicine, or Pediatrics, or Family Practice clinics, or through the new Women's Wellness Center.

"We will stop enrollment to the PCC July 20 and begin offering new TRICARE Prime enrollees their choice of one of the four portals for entry to primary care," Martel said. "Our beneficiaries already enrolled in the PCC will be sent a letter the first week in August reassigning them to a portal best suited to meet their needs and desires."

The closure of the PCC and reassignment to the new portals will affect 4,700 TRICARE Prime patients, and according to Martel, the new method will give them a greater choice, better access to care, and a well-rounded health care service for women.

"With customer service as our focus, newly developed primary care portals, and a caring compassionate health care staff, combined with high quality health care, there has never been a better time to enroll at Naval Hospital Bremerton," Martel said.

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Headline: Dental career begins anew with U.S. citizenship
By LCDR Frederick W. Minor, MSC, Naval Hospital, Beaufort

BEAUFORT, S.C.--Hospital Corpsman Third Class Jose M. Avila is a Sailor who has shown more than his fair share of perseverance and determination. Born in Pinar Del Rio,

Cuba, Avila was one of a select few to attend dental school and become a practicing dentist in his country.

But Avila had long held a desire of coming to America. Then in 1993, the time was opportune for him and three others to flee Cuba in a homemade raft. After five days at sea they were picked up and eventually brought to Miami, where they were allowed humanitarian entry into the United States.

A woman Avila later met in English class told him about the Navy. The information was what he needed to accomplish his other dream of becoming a dentist in America. Because he still needed permanent residency, English proficiency, and citizenship, joining the Navy was very appealing.

Avila visited the Navy recruiter and his adventure began. Since becoming a corpsman, he has competed in several levels of health science and clinical dentistry examinations required to reestablish his dental credentials in the United States. With that done, he now awaits the swearing in ceremony to become a U.S. citizen. Then, he heads for the University of Pennsylvania, where he will begin training as a third year dental student.

After completing his university studies, Avila plans to continue his successful Navy affiliation by seeking a commission in the Navy Dental Corps.

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Headline: TRICARE question and answer

Question: How do I switch from TRICARE Standard to Extra and vice versa?

Can I do this at anytime?

Answer: As long as you are not enrolled in TRICARE Prime, you may switch between Standard and Extra at any time. You can switch by making the choice between your own civilian doctor and a doctor within the Extra network.

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Headline: What a headache: dealing with a migraine
By Jocelyn R. Hauser, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

WASHINGTON--It appears when you least expect it. The intense pain develops on one side of your head, and everything around you seems to make it worse. The formerly unnoticeable sound of the computer now sounds as if it is in stereo and the room lighting feels as if you are staring directly into the sun. No matter what you do or take, it doesn't seem to work fast enough.

This discomfort is caused by a migraine headache--almost everyone has experienced the agony. But there is relief for these mega headaches. Watching what you eat, managing stress, and taking certain medications can help prevent them.

According to the National Headache Foundation, the main foods that trigger the migraine sensation are chocolate,

aged cheese, nuts, tomatoes, and red wine. A group of substances in these foods called amines are what actually cause the severe headache.

Any foods that cause a bad physical reaction such as indigestion or fatigue should be avoided. You should try to eat at the same time every day. Missing meals or going without eating for three to four hours can also trigger migraine headaches because of low blood sugar levels. Include Vitamin D, calcium, magnesium, and riboflavin in your diet.

Beverages with caffeine can help ward off a migraine headache, but too much can cause them. According to CAPT Andrew Dutka, MC, from the Neurology clinic of National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., withdrawal from caffeine is the reason for many headaches, which is why caffeine stops some migraines.

Stress and depression also cause migraine headaches. Using simple stress management techniques such as taking time out for yourself to relax, talking to a friend and getting a good night's sleep can reduce stress and eliminate the chance for a migraine. Never resort to alcohol or drugs as a cure, they only increase your chance of a migraine and also cause new problems.

Dutka said that we still have to be cautious about describing causes of migraine headaches. For some people migraines occur without being induced by stress, diet or drug considerations.

Beta blockers, non-steroidal antiinflammatories and antidepressants can prevent migraines. Doctors recommend daily medication for those who experience two or more severe attacks monthly. Although medications can help prevent migraines, excessive amounts can cause them. You should always consult a physician before taking any medication.

No one likes to be in pain and we should do whatever it takes to prevent the nightmares of migraine headaches. So to help prevent migraines, reduce your stress level and remember to watch what you eat, because a migraine can be just a chocolate bar away.

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Comments about and ideas for MEDNEWS are welcome. Story submissions are encouraged. Contact MEDNEWS editor, Earl Hicks, at email: mednews@us.med.navy.mil; Telephone 202/762-3223, (DSN) 762-3223, or fax 202/762-3224.

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